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DEPT FOR NEA/ARP AMACDONALD AND INR SMOFFATT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/04/2019

TAGS: PGOV PTER MCAP YM

SUBJECT: SOUTHERN MOVEMENT LEADER DESCRIBES NEW MILITARY COMMANDS, ROYG ARMY DISCONTENT

REF: SANAA 1310

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen Seche for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (S) SUMMARY. The Southern Movement has expanded its military organization for more effective operations against Yemeni security services. Recent growth includes the establishment of geographic commands, recruitment of tribal fighters from Abyan and Lahj and flirtation with the possibility of attracting defectors from the Yemeni army. In recent weeks, the movement seems to have continued refocusing itself as a group that both seeks) and is better prepared for) conflict with Yemeni government forces. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (S) Southern Movement leader General Mohammed Saleh Tammah told PolOff on July 29 that the group's military wing was better-organized and more active than earlier this year. Tammah described geographically-based "commands" across the southern governorates headed by former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) military officers. Tammah heads the Yafa-based command in Lahj governorate, with other commands involved in recent fighting located in al-Watheeq, Lowdar and Mudia. "We'll defend what we have, absolutely," he said, to include attacking checkpoints and security forces stationed in southern Yemen. In the aftermath of clashes in late July between supporters of new Southern Movement champion (and former jihadist) Tariq al-Fadhli and ROYG security forces in Abyan, the movement captured three checkpoints in Jaar and destroyed the ruling General People's Congress (GPC) office in Zinjibar with a bomb (NFI), according to Tammah. (Note: Local media confirmed a large explosion at the GPC building on July 29, but did not specify the extent of the damages. End Note.)

¶3. (S) The movement's leaders also claim to have been successful in convincing thousands of discontented tribal fighters - especially from Lahj and Abyan governorates - to fight the government on the side of the Southern Movement. When, on July 27, the ROYG gave Fadhli three days to leave the country or face the consequences, thousands of tribesmen traveled from across Lahj and Abyan governorates to defend Fadhli's Zinjibar home, according to Tammah. The fighters were armed with automatic rifles, rocket-propelled grenades and other explosive devices (NFI). (Note: Such small arms and light weapons are common throughout Yemen. End Note.) Tribal elements fighting on the side of the Southern Movement are not paid salaries, but receive only food as payment, Tammah said. He emphatically denied the suggestion that al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) elements were also fighting alongside the movement. "The southerners want to create a country, but al-Qaeda just wants to destroy," Tammah said. He said the ROYG uses the specter of AQAP to persuade Gulf countries not to support the movement.

¶4. (S) Tammah also said that in late July, movement leaders in Yafa (Lahj governorate) received a delegation of 30 ROYG

army officers from the 115th Brigade based in Shebwa who offered to desert the military and fight for the movement in exchange for salaries. The mostly southern officers said they represented hundreds of soldiers unhappy with the army's widespread discrimination in hiring and promoting soldiers from the southern governorates. Movement leaders called former PDRY Vice President and self-declared President Ali Salim al-Beidh, who said he was unable to pay salaries "yet."

The Shebwa delegation, therefore, returned to the ROYG army for the time being. Tammah said local movement leaders are waiting for a response from Beidh regarding his ability to personally finance the movement's activities.

COMMENT

¶5. (S) The movement's increasing identification as an Abyan-focused, Fadhli-led confrontation with the ROYG could represent a new phase in the conflict. The movement has continued to refocus itself as an organization that both seeks) and is better prepared for) conflict with ROYG security services. While there are still those who are "true believers" in the southern cause, recent fighting has also attracted a variety of disgruntled elements) from tribal fighters to unemployed youth to possibly extremist elements) who have a bone to pick with the ROYG. While some demonstrations and incidents, especially in Abyan, have reportedly involved thousands, it is unclear if - as Tammah claims - these numbers reflect real growth in the movement's popular support, or simply the ability of individuals like Tariq al-Fadhli to rally tribal loyalists, regardless of the cause. END COMMENT.

SECHE